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# FSIS



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Department of  
Agriculture

Food Safety  
and Inspection  
Service

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# BACKGROUND

## Nutrition Labeling of Meat and Poultry Products

The U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS) joined in the spring of 1989 with the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), Food and Drug Administration (FDA) to reform the food label.

The new labels will help consumers follow the Dietary Guidelines developed by the USDA and HHS. These guidelines emphasize the importance of a well-balanced diet:

- Eat a variety of foods.
- Maintain healthy weight.
- Choose a diet low in fat, saturated fat, and cholesterol.
- Choose a diet with plenty of vegetables, fruits, and grain products.
- Use sugars only in moderation.
- Use salt and sodium only in moderation.
- If you drink alcoholic beverages, do so in moderation.

The new food label marks an enormous collaborative effort:

FSIS is responsible for ensuring accuracy in labeling of meat and poultry products; FDA is responsible for labeling all other foods.

Legislation, named the Nutrition Labeling and Education Act of 1990 (NLEA), required nutrition labeling of foods under FDA jurisdiction. Although the NLEA does not mandate labeling of meat and poultry products, FSIS issued companion regulations for these foods.

FSIS and FDA issued parallel regulations that harmonize as much as possible and that create the most uniform nutrition labels possible for virtually all foods.

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## USDA Regulation

On January 6, 1993, USDA issued its final rule on "Nutrition Labeling of Meat and Poultry Products," as did FDA for all other foods. Manufacturers already have begun to redesign their food labels according to the new specifications. The rule becomes effective July 1994, when most processed meat and poultry products must carry the new nutrition label.

### Mandatory Labeling

FSIS requires mandatory nutrition labeling for most meat and poultry products except raw, single-ingredient products. Packages of chili and hot dogs, for instance, must bear nutrition labeling panels.

The label information is based on the product "as packaged." "As packaged" labeling must list information about the nutrients in a serving of food at the time it is purchased, without considering further consumer preparation. The nutrient content of some products, like bacon, may change greatly during preparation. So, a label also may list the information "as consumed," provided that it clearly states preparation and cooking instructions. "As consumed" means the nutritional information is based on the product after it is cooked using common methods, such as oven roasting, that do not add ingredients such as fat, flour, or salt, which could alter the nutrient profile.

FSIS is in the process of reviewing the way it approves labels for meat and poultry products. Until a new system is adopted, the agency will continue to examine and approve every label before the product can enter the marketplace to make sure the nutrient information is accurate.

### Voluntary Labeling

FSIS encourages voluntary nutrition labeling on raw, single-ingredient meat and poultry products, such as beef roasts, raw chicken breasts, and ground beef.

Manufacturers of raw, single-ingredient meat and poultry products who choose to provide nutrition information on the label must adhere to the same requirements of the mandatory program, except that they may declare nutrients based on the product "as consumed" or "as packaged."

FSIS will encourage firms to participate in the voluntary program and will evaluate participation. If 60 percent of evaluated stores are not participating at a significant level in the voluntary program, FSIS plans to initiate proposed rulemaking to determine whether it would be beneficial to require nutrition labeling for raw, single-ingredient products.

*Point-of-purchase materials.* As an alternative to providing nutrition information on the label, manufacturers of meat and poultry products that fall in the voluntary nutrition labeling category also may provide nutrition information through point-of-purchase materials, such as pamphlets, wall posters, and videos.

Nutrition information in point-of-purchase materials is given for meat with external fat or poultry with skin. Optional information may be shown for trimmed meat or poultry without skin.

### Exemptions

FSIS has exempted certain products from the mandatory nutrition labeling provisions. Some of these exemptions are:

- products served in restaurants and other institutions, because consumers won't see the packaging.
- products in small packages weighing less than 1/2 ounce, unless a nutrition claim is made (a modified label is permitted for intermediate-size packages).



- products produced by small businesses, unless a nutrition claim is made. A processed consumer product will be exempt from nutrition labeling if the firm producing it has 500 or fewer employees and produces less than 100,000 pounds of that product a year. This small business exemption will be phased in over a three-year period.
- products produced or packaged at retail, such as sliced bologna.

## The New Nutrition Label at A Glance

### The Front Label

Product claims, such as "low-fat" or "light," on USDA products will be defined by regulation. These definitions ensure that products that carry claims are consistent from manufacturer to manufacturer, and consumers are assured they can believe what they read on the package.

*Nutrient Content Claims* - While descriptive claims like "light" and "low-fat" have long been used on food labels, their meaning—and their usefulness in helping consumers plan a healthful diet—will now be defined in regulations. FSIS has set specific requirements for using the following terms:

- |                  |                |
|------------------|----------------|
| • free           | • light (lite) |
| • less           | • high         |
| • low            | • reduced      |
| • good source of | • lean         |
| • extra lean     | • more         |

For example, if a meat or poultry processor describes an individual food as "low in fat," the food must meet the specific FSIS definition: 3 grams or less of fat per reference amount customarily consumed (RACC). If an individual food is described as "low in calories," it cannot contain more than 40 calories per RACC.

In addition, meat and poultry products can use the terms "lean" or "extra lean" if they meet specific definitions.

*Lean* refers to a serving of meat and poultry with less than 10 grams of fat, 4.5 grams or less of saturated fat, and less than 95 milligrams of cholesterol per 100 grams.

*Extra lean* refers to meat and poultry with less than 5 grams of fat, less than 2 grams of saturated fat, and less than 95 milligrams of cholesterol per 100 grams.

*Claims in Brand Names* - Often the brand name of a product will use a nutrient content claim—for example, "Lean Cuisine." FSIS permits use of a nutrient content claim in a brand name if the product meets the required definition of the term. A brand name containing a descriptive term that is not defined by the regulation is permitted only if it was in use prior to November 27, 1991 (the date of the proposal). If a firm adopted the brand name after November 27, 1991, it must petition FSIS to use the term.

The word "healthy" and derivatives such as "healthful" or "healthier" often have been used in brand names. FSIS published on January 6, 1993, a proposed rule with request for comments on use of the word "healthy" on the label of a meat or poultry product.



*Health Claims* - FSIS also is studying the use of "health claims," that is, describing a food as low in a nutrient that has been linked to a disease. The description of a food as low in fat, followed by the statement that high fat intake has been linked to a high risk of cancer, would be a health claim. FSIS expects to complete its review of this issue soon, and then will address the issue publicly.

## The Label: Nutrition Guide

Most packaged foods will carry an up-to-date, easy-to-use nutrition information guide that will serve as a key to planning a healthful diet.

### Chili with Beans

#### The New Food Label

Nutrition Facts			
Serving Size 1 cup (253 g)			
Servings Per Container 4			
Amount Per Serving			
Calories 260		Calories from Fat 70	
% Daily Value*			
Total Fat 8g		13%	
Saturated Fat 3g		17%	
Cholesterol 130mg		44%	
Sodium 1010mg		42%	
Total Carbohydrate 22g		7%	
Dietary Fiber 9g		36%	
Sugars 4g			
Protein 25g			
Vitamin A 35%		•	Vitamin C 2%
Calcium 6%		•	Iron 30%
* Percent Daily Values are based on a 2,000 calorie diet. Your daily values may be higher or lower depending on your calorie needs:			
	Calories:	2,000	2,500
Total Fat	Less than	65g	80g
Sat Fat	Less than	20g	25g
Cholesterol	Less than	300mg	300mg
Sodium	Less than	2,400mg	2,400mg
Total Carbohydrate		300g	375g
Dietary Fiber		25g	30g
Calories per gram:			
Fat 9 • Carbohydrate 4 • Protein 4			



*Serving Size* - Serving sizes in the new rule are uniform and consistent across product lines, and reflect the average amounts people actually eat. Some serving sizes are listed as ounces—for instance, the serving size for beef steak is three ounces; others are listed in common household measures—for instance, the serving size for chili is one cup.

*List of Nutrients* - The list of nutrients covers those that are currently of public health significance (sodium and fat, for example). Consumers want to know about the levels of these and other nutrients in food products to make dietary choices that benefit their health.

*Calories from Fat* - The number of calories from fat is shown on the label to help consumers meet dietary guidelines that recommend people get only 30 percent of their daily calories from fat.

*Daily Values* - Daily values are also something new. Consumers can use these numbers to evaluate how a food fits into a healthful diet. Because individual dietary needs vary, two daily values are listed on the label as references—one based on a 2,000 calorie diet and the other on a 2,500 calorie diet. The "Daily Values" listing is also an easy way to know at a glance whether the package carries the new food label.

*% Daily Value* - These are numbers consumers can use to evaluate how a food fits into a healthful diet.

## **Compliance**

FSIS monitors labels in the marketplace as part of its regulatory mission. The agency will select products and then analyze the food to make sure the label information is accurate. If the nutrient values of the food do not match the values on the label, FSIS will notify the company, which must either change the label or provide data that support the label information listed. Companies must keep records on their nutrient analyses and/or recipe calculations.

## **Public Education Activities**

A new food label is only as beneficial as the ability of consumers to understand and use it. FSIS and FDA are committed to helping consumers learn how to read the new label and use it to choose a healthful diet.

The agencies are coordinating a public and private sector "National Exchange for Food Labeling Education (NEFLE)" to help educate the American public about nutrition labeling. NEFLE includes representatives from Government, and health, consumer, industry, and educational groups, and is open to anyone. These groups bring varied resources to the massive public education campaign. For instance, health organizations share information and materials on labeling education activities through a central network at the USDA/FDA-sponsored Food Labeling Education Information Center located at USDA's National Agricultural Library. USDA and FDA conduct periodic surveys to identify consumers' knowledge and attitudes toward health and nutrition and are developing consumer brochures on the new food label.







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